

Chicago Historical Society
(now Boulevard Recording Studios, Inc.)
632 North Dearborn Street
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1010

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
(now Boulevard Recording Studios, Inc.)

Location: 632 North Dearborn Street, at Ontario Street;
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Chicago Title and Trust Company

Present Occupant: Boulevard Recording Studios, Inc.

Statement of Significance: The building was designed by the Chicago architect Henry Ives Cobb in the Romanesque style of the 1880's and 90's.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners (chain of title); Legal description of the property: Lots 1, 2, 3, in Block 23 of Wolcott's Addition to Chicago in the east half of the north-east quarter Section 9-39-14.

The following is an abstract of the chain of title contained in Book 457B in the Cook County Recorder's Office.

The Chicago Historical Society is first mentioned on March 19, 1878, in a mortgage agreement with John B. Turner, et al (Document 173087). The property apparently remained in the hands of the Historical Society until December 21, 1949, when the County Treasurer et al took possession (Document 49S18771). On April 3, 1950, a series of changes transferred the property from the Institute of Design to Illinois Institute of Technology (Document 14767879); from the Chicago Historical Society to the Illinois Institute of Technology (Document 14767880); and from the Illinois Institute of Technology to the Chicago Title and Trust Company (Document 14767881). On June 23, 1955, Eloise Osman received the deed for the property from Illinois Institute of Technology (Document 16278824).

Mary Oppolito is mentioned as owner on April 20, 1959, (Document 17513733). On April 29, 1959, the property was apparently released to the Chicago Title and Trust Company (Document 17523335).

2. Date of erection: 1892; begun on August 13, 1892.
3. Architect: Henry Ives Cobb.
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown.

5. Original plans, construction, etc.: The exterior is of Aberdeen red granite in the Romanesque Revival style of H. H. Richardson. The interior was to be completely fire-proof, including furnishings. The main hall contained portraits and relics from the time of French influence in the Mississippi valley. There was also a fireplace built of stones from buildings destroyed in the fire of 1871. In addition the building contained a library, lecture room, and John Crerar Hall. The total cost was \$190,000 [John H. Jones, A Half Century of Chicago Building (Chicago: 1910), pp. 57-58/.
6. Additions and alterations: After the Historical Society moved in 1931, the building accommodated various new tenants. A recent fire (1963) has damaged the interior. The exterior is essentially unchanged.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Founded in 1827, before the incorporation of Chicago itself, the Chicago Historical Society is the oldest cultural institution in the city [“To Preserve Relics, Cornerstone of the Historical Society Building Laid,” Chicago Tribune, November 13, 1892/]. The Society's first building, on the same site as the Cobb building, was destroyed in the fire of 1871. The Society's collection, which had been completely wiped out in 1871, was rebuilt only to be destroyed again on July 14, 1874 in a smaller fire south of Van Buren Street. Finally in 1877, a new building was erected. This building was soon found to be inadequate and was wrecked to make way for Cobb's building. In 1931, the Society moved into its present Georgian Revival building, designed by Graham, Probst, and White, in Lincoln Park, at Clark Street and North Avenue [Frank A. Randall, History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 132/.

C. Bibliography:

Andreas, A. T. History of Chicago. 3 Volumes. Published by the Author, 1886. Vol. III, pp. 73-74.
Biographical material on Henry Ives Cobb.

Angle, Paul McClelland. The Chicago Historical Society, 1856-1956. New York: Rand McNally, 1956. pp. 133-34, 136, 138, 140-141, 142-47, 166. Photographs of interior and exterior p. 153.

"Building of the Historical Society," American Architect and Building News. Vol. LVI (June 19, 1897). p. 93.

"Chicago Historical Society Building, Henry Ives Cobb, Architect," Inland Architect. Vol. XXV, No. 5 (June, 1895).
p. 52, plate and plans.

"Henry Ives Cobb, Obituary Notice," Architecture. Vol. LXIII
(May, 1931). p. 19.
Includes a list of buildings he designed.

Industrial Chicago. 6 Volumes. Chicago: The Goodspeed
Publishing Company, 1891. Vol. I, pp. 625-626.
Biographical material on Henry Ives Cobb.

Jones, John H. A Half Century of Chicago Building. Chicago:
1910. pp. 57-58, photograph.

Lewis, Julius. Henry Ives Cobb and the Chicago School.
Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Division of
the Humanities in candidacy for the degree of Master of
Arts, Department of Art, Chicago, Illinois, 1954.
Bibliography, Burnham Library in the Art Institute
of Chicago.

Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building
Construction in Chicago. Urbana: The University of
Illinois Press, 1949. pp. 132, 288. Bibliography p. 132.

Schuyler, Montgomery. "A Critique (with illustrations) of
the Works of Adler and Sullivan, D. H. Burnham & Co.,
Henry Ives Cobb," Architectural Record (December, 1895).
New York.

"To Preserve Relics, Cornerstone of the Historical Society
Building Laid," Chicago Tribune, November 13, 1892.
Photostat of the original. Clippings in the Library
of the Chicago Historical Society.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The following is from "To Preserve Relics, Cornerstone of the
Historical Society Building Laid," Chicago Tribune, November 13,
1892:

"The new building designed by Henry Ives Cobb, will be one
of the handsomest in the city. It will be of granite, Roman-
esque style. Its general ground dimensions are 120 feet on
Dearborn Avenue by 100 feet on Ontario Street, but there is
a court at the northwest corner. It will be only two stories
and a basement in height, but its steep roofs make its greatest
height eighty feet. It has a large gable in the center of the

Ontario Street front, to emphasize the location of the Gilpin Library. The windows on the first story are very wide, and only four in number, while those on the second story are numerous, arched, and connected. The material used is Wisconsin rock-faced red granite for the fronts, and steel for the interior. It is designed to be as completely fireproof as possible.

"The entrance is broad and simple, and leads directly into a spacious hall lighted by a dome. In the basement will be a hall 28 x 33 feet in size, storerooms, supper and waiting rooms, cloak and toilet rooms, and in the rear heating apparatus. On the first floor will be the secretary's office, the reception and reading rooms. The picture gallery, the John Crerar lecture room, and the Gilpin Library, which will be a single room two stories in height, with gallery, and extending across the west end of the building. On the second floor will be the museum, the director's room, a workroom, and an art gallery. The building was begun August 13 and is now two or three courses of the heavy granite work above the ground. The cornerstone is a massive affair, 6 x 2 x 2 feet in size, in the third course, at the street corner, with its long dimension on Ontario Street. At present it has no inscription on it, but one will be made hereafter. The building will cost, exclusive of the ground, \$150,000, of which \$125,000 has already been provided, and it is expected that it will be ready for occupancy by May 1."

Prepared by Larry J. Homolka
Historian
and
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Project Supervisor
National Park Service
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